REPORT ON THE 2005 EXCAVATIONS IN BATURYN

The Canada-Ukraine archaeological expedition has conducted its sixth annual excavations of Baturyn in Chernihiv province, Ukraine. The Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies (CIUS), the Shevchenko Scientific Society of America, and the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies (PIMS) in Toronto sponsor this project. The “Baturyn Fund,” established by the President of Ukraine in 2005, supported, for the first time, these excavations. Prof. Zenon Kohut, Director of CIUS, is the patron of and academic advisor to this project.

In 2005, the Baturyn expedition team grew to nearly 150 students and scholars from the universities of Chernihiv, Nizhyn and the Kyiv Mohyla Academy. Dr. Volodymyr Kovalenko of the University of Chernihiv was the expedition leader. Dr. Volodymyr Mezentsev of the University of Toronto acted as the CIUS Research Fellow responsible for the Baturyn Project. Prof. Martin Dimnik of PIMS has overseen the funding and helps to publish the findings of the excavations in the Canadian press. Between 1669 and 1708, Baturyn was the capital of the Hetman state and one of the most significant and prosperous towns in Ukraine. In 1708, it was the centre of an insurrection led by Hetman Ivan Mazepa (1687-1709). In an alliance with Sweden, Mazepa attempted to liberate Left-Bank Ukraine from the increasing control of Muscovy. That same year, by order of Tsar Peter I, the Russian army razed Baturyn and also slaughtered the town’s military garrison together with the civilian population of 11,000-14,000.

Baturyn recovered during the reign of Hetman Kyrylo Rozumovs’kyi (1750-64) who moved his residence there from Hlukhiv. Although the Russian empire abolished the Hetmanate in 1764, Rozumovs’kyi continued to support the construction of monumental churches, schools, hospitals, and the famous palace in Baturyn until his death in 1803. From this time, the town declined and became a semi-agrarian settlement. Since 2005, the Ukrainian government has promoted the restoration of Baturyn’s outstanding architectural monuments and expansion of its historical preserve and regional museum.

Last summer, the expedition unearthed remnants of the gallery or porch of the hetman’s central palace in the town’s citadel. Traces of the conflagration of 1708 that destroyed this state edifice have been revealed. In 2001-2004, archaeologists excavated the entire site of this palace and reconstructed its ground plan and architectural type. This residence of hetmans Dem’ian Mnohohrishnyi (1669-72) and Ivan Samoilovych (1672-87) was a comparatively sizeable, rectangular, one-story, vaulted brick structure. It is likely that it represented the traditional type of masonry mansions of the Cossack officers’ class, which originated from wooden Ukrainian peasant dwellings (khata).

On the grounds of the former fortress, the team discovered a cemetery of the hetman capital’s main church, Holy Trinity Cathedral, commissioned by Mazepa ca. 1692. It was also ravaged in 1708. Next season, the expedition intends to locate the foundations of the lost Trinity Cathedral along with its tall belfry known as the “Mazepine tower”.

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Nearby, researchers unearthed the remnants of several burnt ordinary timber dwellings belonging to the fortress’ residents. In one of the storage pits, the skeleton of a slain youth was revealed, while next to it, the burnt skull of another casualty of 1708. In the fortress, archaeologists found 15 silver and copper Polish, Czech, and Russian coins, three neck crosses, pieces of the engraved copper setting from an icon or a book, two silver finger-rings, a copper seal-ring with carved images of Adam and Eve, two fabric fragments and a strip of brocade, artistic glazed ceramic tobacco pipes in the shapes of a flower and a boot, numerous pieces of broken fine ceramic tiles (kakhli) with relief patterns used for decorating the stoves in houses of the elite, fragmented painted table-plates and various glassware of the 17-18th centuries, as well as musket or pistol bullets, a cannon ball and grapeshot, and a spearhead—relics of the heroic defence of Baturyn.

In 2005, the expedition extended its archaeological research of the remnants of Mazepa’s palace, erected by the hetman in the Baturyn suburb of Honcharivka before 1700. This rich villa was looted by the marauders in 1708 and then stood abandoned, falling gradually into ruins.

Archaeologists unearthed new portions of foundations of the palace and its annex. They established that the structure’s spacious basement (15 x 15 m.) had four storage rooms separated by two inner walls, crossing at right angles. Remnants of stairs were uncovered in the annex. Laboratory examinations of the bricks and lime mortar from wall debris conducted at the Institute of Geology of the National Academy of Sciences in Kyiv showed that they are 1.3-1.5 times stronger than the average contemporary brick.

According to the 1744 drawing of Mazepa’s palace and archaeological evidence the main part of this building (without the annex) had a square outline, three floors, a mansard, wooden ceilings, and a vertical symmetrical composition of its front elevation. In general, this edifice was designed and adorned in the Western European, or more precisely, Italian Baroque style. However, its elaborated exterior embellishment included elements borrowed from Ukrainian Baroque architecture. Conceivably, the Baturyn ceramists fashioned the construction and decorative materials for this palace. Thus, recent archaeological investigations indicate that Mazepa’s largest, principal residence located near his capital was a remarkable structure with no known direct analogies in Ukrainian or Western architecture, while displaying some local decorative details.

In the summer of 2005, within the citadel and fortress, the expedition uncovered 33 graves of Baturyn townsfolk from the late 17th-early 18th centuries (the period of Mazepa’s rule). Seventeen of them, containing the skeletons of children and women buried in shallow pits without coffins, as well as some human remains devoid of any traces of a Christian burial, have been identified as victims of the Baturyn tragedy of 1708. For the first time, archaeologists unearthed two family graves with the skeletons of women together with their children or grandchildren who evidently lost their lives simultaneously. In total, between 1996 and 2005, researchers have excavated 92 graves of the 17th and early 18th centuries in Baturyn. Most of them—48 graves—belonged primarily to the civilian population, which perished during the fall of the hetman’s capital.

Thus, new archaeological research confirms that Baturyn was one of the leading centres of development of Ukrainian Baroque culture. The town’s destruction in 1708 disrupted its intensive growth. While Baturyn recovered under Rozumov’s’kyi, it failed to revive its broad Western economic and cultural ties as well as the high level of urban craft and distinctive folk art, which flourished there during the illustrious Mazepa era.

The Canada-Ukraine archaeological expedition plans to continue its excavations in Baturyn next summer. For further information about this project, please contact the author of this article (tel.: 416-766-1408; email: v.mezentsev@utoronto.ca).

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